

What is the FMLA and How Does it Work?

The FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act) became effective on August 5, 1993, for most employers. The U.S. Department of Labor's Employment Standards Administration , Wage and Hour Division, administers and enforces the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for all private, state, and local government employees and some federal employees. Most Federal and certain congressional employees are also covered by the law and are subject to the jurisdiction of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management or Congress. The Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division published a Final Rule under the Family and Medical Leave Act. The Final Rule became effective on January 16, 2009, and updates the FMLA regulations to implement new military family leave entitlements enacted under the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008.

The law contains provisions on employer coverage; employee eligibility for the law's benefits; entitlements to leave, maintenance of health benefits during leave, and job restoration after leave; notice and certification of the need for FMLA leave; and, protection for employees who request or take FMLA leave. This law also requires employers to keep certain records.

EMPLOYER COVERAGE

FMLA applies to all:

- Public agencies, including state, local and federal employers, local education agencies (schools), and
- Private- sector employers who employ 50 or more employees in 20 or more workweeks in the current or preceding calendar year, and who are engaged in commerce or in any industry or activity affecting commerce- including joint employers and successors of covered employers.

EMPLOYEE ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for FMLA benefits , an employee **must**:

- 1) Work for a covered employer
- 2) Have worked for the employer for a total of **12 months ***; and
- 3) Have worked at least **1250 hours** over the previous 12 months*;and
- 4) Work at a location in the United States by the employer within 75 miles

See special rules for returning reservists under USSERRA.

LEAVE ENTITLEMENT

A covered employer **MUST** grant an eligible employee up to a total of 12 work weeks of **unpaid** leave during any 12 month period for one or more of the following reasons:

- For the birth and care of a newborn child of the employee
- For placement with the employee of a son or daughter for adoption or foster care
- To care for an immediate family member(spouse, child, or parent)with a serious health condition; **or**
- To take medical leave when the employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition.
- Effective January 16, 2009 FMLA was amended to allow a “ spouse ,son ,daughter ,parent ,or next of kin “ to take up to **26 weeks of leave to care for a member of the Armed Forces ,** including a member of the National Guard, or Reserves, who is undergoing medical treatment , recuperation, or therapy , is otherwise in outpatient status, or is otherwise on the temporary disability retired list , for a serious injury or illness

Spouses employed by the same employer are jointly entitled to a **combined** total of 12 workweeks of family leave for the birth and care of the newborn child, for placement of a child for adoption or foster care, and to care for a parent who has a serious health condition.ⁱ

Leave for birth and care, or placement for adoption or foster care must conclude within 12 months of the birth or placement.

Under some circumstances, employees may take FMLA leave intermittently- which means taking leave in blocks of time, or by reducing their normal weekly or daily work schedule.

- If FMLA leave is for the birth and care or placement for adoption or foster care, use of intermittent leave is subject to the employer’s approval.
- FMLA leave may be taken intermittently whenever **medically necessary** to care for a seriously ill family member, or because the employee is seriously ill and unable to work.

Also, subject to certain conditions, employees **or** employers may choose to use accrued **paid** leave (such as sick or vacation leave) to cover some or all of the FMLA leave.

The employer is responsible for designating if an employee’s use of paid leave counts as FMLA leave, based on information from the employee.

Serious health condition- means an illness , injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves either:

- Any period of incapacity or treatment connected with inpatient care(i.e.; an overnight stay) in a hospital, hospice, or residential medical-care facility, and any period of incapacity or subsequent treatment in connection with such inpatient care; **or**
- Continuing treatment by a healthcare provider which includes any period of incapacity (i.e., inability to work, attend school or perform other regular daily activities) due to:
 - (1) A health condition(including treatment therefore or recovery (therefrom) lasting more than (3) three consecutive days, and any subsequent treatment or period of incapacity relating to the same condition, that **also** includes:
 - Treatment two or more times by or under the supervision of a health care provider; **or**,
 - One treatment by a health care provider with a continuing regimen of treatment; **or**,
 - (2) Pregnancy or prenatal care. A visit to the health care provider is not necessary for each absence; **or**,
 - (3) A chronic serious health condition which continues over an extended period of time, requires periodic visits to a health care provider, and may involve occasional episodes of incapacity(ex. Asthma, diabetes).A visit to a health care provider is not necessary for each absence; **or**
 - (4) A permanent or long-term condition for which treatment may not be effective (e.g.; Alzheimer's, a severe stroke, terminal cancer) . Only supervision by a health care provider is required, rather than active treatment; **or**
 - (5) Any absence to receive multiple treatments for restorative surgery or for a condition which would likely result in a period of incapacity of more than three days if not treated (e.g. chemotherapy or radiation treatments for cancer).

“ Health Care Provider “ means:

- Doctors of medicine or osteopathy authorized to practice medicine or surgery by the state in which the doctors practice; **or**
- Podiatrists, dentists ,clinical psychologists, optometrists and chiropractors (limited to manual manipulation of the spine to correct a subluxation as demonstrated by x-ray to exist) authorized to practice, and performing within the scope of their practice, under state law; **or**
- Christian Science practitioners listed with the First Church of Christ Scientist in Boston, Massachusetts; **or**
- Any health care provider recognized by the employer or the employer's group health plan benefits manager.

MAINTENANCE OF HEALTH BENEFITS

A covered employer is required to maintain group health insurance coverage for an employee on FMLA leave whenever such insurance was provided before the leave was taken and on the same terms as if

the employee had continued to work. If applicable, arrangements will need to be made for employees to pay their share of health insurance premiums while on leave.

In some instances, the employer may recover premiums it paid to maintain health coverage for an employee who fails to return to work from FMLA leave.

JOB RESTORATION

Upon return from FMLA leave, an employee must be restored to the employee's original job, or to an equivalent job with equivalent pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment.

In addition, an employee's use of FMLA leave cannot result in the loss of any employment benefit that the employee earned or was entitled to **before** using FMLA leave, nor be counted against the employee under a "no-fault" attendance policy.

Under specified and limited circumstances where restoration to employment will cause substantial and grievous economic injury to its operations, an employer may refuse to reinstate certain highly-paid "key" employees after using FMLA leave during which health coverage was maintained. In order to do so, the employer must:

- Notify the employee of his/her status as a "key" employee in response to the employee's notice of intent to take FMLA leave.
- Notify the employee as soon as the employer decides it will deny job restoration, and explain the reasons for said decision;
- Offer the employee a reasonable opportunity to return to work from FMLA leave after giving this notice; **and**
- Make a final determination as to whether reinstatement will be denied at the end of the leave period if the employee then requests restoration.

A "**key**" employee is a salaried "eligible" employee who is among the highest paid ten percent of employees within 75 miles of the work site.

NOTICE AND CERTIFICATION

Employees seeking to use FMLA leave are required to provide 30 day advance notice of the need to take FMLA leave when the need is foreseeable and such notice is practicable.

Employers may also require employees to provide:

- Medical certification supporting the need for leave due to a serious health condition affecting the employee or an immediate family member.
- Second or third medical opinions (at the employer's expense) and periodic recertification; **and**
- Periodic reports during FMLA leave regarding the employee's status and intent to return to work.

When intermittent leave is needed to care for an immediate family member or the employee's own illness, and is for planned medical treatment, the employee must try to schedule treatment so as to not unduly disrupt the employer's operation.

Covered employers must post a notice approved by the Secretary of Labor explaining rights and responsibilities under FMLA . An employer that willfully violates this posting requirement may be subject to a fine of up to \$100.00 for each separate offense.

Also, covered employers must inform employees of their rights and responsibilities under FMLA, including giving specific written information on what is required of the employee and what might happen in certain circumstances, such as if the employee fails to return to work after FMLA leave.

UNLAWFUL ACTS

It is unlawful for an employer to interfere with, restrain, or deny the exercise of any right provided by FMLA. It is also unlawful for an employer to discharge or discriminate against any individual for opposing any practice, or because of involvement in any proceeding, relating to FMLA.

ENFORCEMENT

The Wage and Hour Division investigates complaints. If violations cannot be satisfactorily resolved, the U.S. Department of Labor may bring action in court to compel compliance. Individuals may also bring a private civil action against an employer for violations.

OTHER PROVISIONS

Special rules apply to employees of local education agencies. Generally, these rules provide for FMLA leave to be taken in blocks of time when intermittent leave is needed or the leave is required near the end of a school term.

Salaried executive , administrative, and professional employees of covered employers who meet the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) criteria for exemption from minimum wage and overtime under Regulations, 29 CFR Part 541, do not lose their FLSA- exempt status by using any unpaid FMLA leave. This special exception to the “ salary basis” requirements for FLSA’s exemption extends only to “eligible” employees’ use of leave required by FMLA.

The FMLA does not affect any other federal or state law which prohibits discrimination, nor supercede any state or local law which provides greater family or medical leave protection. Nor does it affect an employer’s obligation to provide greater leave rights under a collective bargaining agreement or employment benefit plan. The FMLA also encourages employers to provide more generous leave benefits.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information, please contact the nearest office of the Wage and Hour Division, listed in most telephone directories under U.S. Government, Department of Labor.

U.S. Department of Labor

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200 Constitution Avenue ,NW

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